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INFO RUEHB/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 3963
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RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 9293
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 2203
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 3622
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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

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SENSITIVE
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DEPT FOR SA/INS
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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PGOV PHUM PTER MOPS NP
SUBJECT: RELEASES CONTINUE AMID VIOLENCE

REF: KATHMANDU 427

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) The government has released more than 900 student leaders, political activists and others arrested in the days leading up to the February 1 anniversary of the King's takeover and the February 8 municipal elections, although 800 remain in detention. Maoist violence throughout the country, including planting explosive devises in blockades on Nepal's main highway, continued despite security forces' ongoing offensive in southwestern Nepal. End Summary.

MORE PARTY ACTIVISTS RELEASED

¶12. (SBU) His Majesty's Government of Nepal (HMGN) released over fifty detainees, who were held for protests surrounding the February 1 anniversary and the February 8 municipal elections. Some of the releases followed court orders, others were done at the authorities' own initiative. Additional habeas corpus petitions were filed with the Supreme Court on February 16 demanding the release of more leaders. The Information Center Service Center (INSEC) reported that there have been over 900 political prisoners released since February 1, 2006, however, 800 more remain in custody. Police sources report that releases will continue, with even more detainees released after the King's Democracy Day address on February 19, a government holiday.

MAOISTS BLOCK HIGHWAY DESPITE SECURITY FORCES' OFFENSIVE

¶13. (SBU) On February 16, Maoists disrupted traffic on the Butwal-Bardhghat section (southwestern Nepal) of the Mahendra Highway (Nepal's major east-west highway) by placing blockades lined with hidden explosives along the road. Children and other civilians are often the victims of these bombs. (Note: According to UNICEF there were 124 civilian victim-activated explosions in 2005. More than 100 were from Maoist equipment, only one is known to be from a government device. This statistic places Nepal among the 10 worst affected in the world. End note.) Maoists also detonated

several bombs at different places along the highway. The blockages halted the movement of vehicles, limiting both commercial and private travel. The Maoists were able to block traffic despite the security forces' ongoing aerial and land attack against rebels in Sunwal (southwestern Nepal).

MAOIST VIOLENCE CONTINUES

¶4. (SBU) Maoist violence continued around the country. On February 16, a civilian was killed when a landmine planted by the Maoists was detonated in Parsa District (south-central Nepal). Maoists continued to kidnap students and civilians, including six civilians in Pyuthan District (midwest Nepal). On February 15, Maoists ambushed an army patrol near the village of Bibeke (150 miles west of Kathmandu), killing three soldiers and injuring two others. In the attack the night of February 14, three security men were killed and 19 others seriously wounded in clashes with Maoist rebels at Gothadi (southwestern Nepal); numbers of Maoists killed or wounded are still unknown (Reftel).

COMMENT

¶5. (SBU) Even with the recent releases of political party members, there are still hundreds of detainees in custody. The political parties have to date met the stream of Maoist violence with silence.

MORIARTY